

Sermon for Sunday, April 5, 2009

Palm Sunday By Tim Ljunggren

First Lesson **Isaiah 50:4-9a**
Psalm **118:1-2, 19-29**
Second Lesson **Hebrews 9:11-15**
Gospel **John 12:1-11**

Today we celebrate together one of the great feasts of the Church calendar- the feast of Palm Sunday. Today we gather together to celebrate Christ's entry into the city of Jerusalem. Today we celebrate Christ as the king who enters our own personal Jerusalem- our hearts. Today's feast day is a momentary feast of joy and celebration, because tonight we begin the final leg of our journey towards Pascha. Our mood changes from one of joy this morning to one of solemnity, almost of sorrow this evening as we lead up to the great sacrifice that Christ performed for us on the cross.

The feast of Palm Sunday has been celebrated in our Church since the earliest days of Christianity, but the use of Palms in connection with religious celebrations goes all the way back to Old Testament times. Oddly enough Palm trees did not grow around the city of Jerusalem, and people would often buy imported Palms for religious celebrations, in particular The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated at the temple in Jerusalem. The Palm branch was used as a visual tool proclaiming the sovereignty of God as the true king of the Israelites.

With the expectation of the Messiah, and the events of Christ's ministry on earth, word traveled quickly around Judea that Jesus was the one whom the prophets had spoken about and whom everyone was expecting. Yesterday Christ performed a miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead, the miracle that foreshadowed his glorious resurrection next Sunday. Now everyone is convinced that this is the Messiah-king who will save the Israelites. And Christ fulfills the prophecy of Zachariah, entering Jerusalem on a donkey. All of Israel is preparing to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, and Christ enters also as the salvific king who will save Israel not from the tyranny of the Roman Empire, but from the curse of death through His own death and resurrection.

We celebrate Christ as the king who enters our hearts, our own personal Jerusalem. But is Christ able to enter? Is there room in our hearts for Christ to

rule as king? Often the doors of our hearts are locked. Often Christ is unable to enter because there is already another king of the heart - ourselves. And how do we solve this problem of trying to let Christ in? How do we instill within ourselves the one thing that is missing- God?

The answer is to surrender. Surrender to the will of God. Surrender your life to the one who gave you life. We are constantly bound and held captive by the temporal things of this life. We are prisoners of our own selves, of this world, of our careers, of money, of the politicians who rule over us, we are even slaves to our own passions. The only way to find peace, to find true happiness, to experience true love is to surrender ourselves to God.

Today, as we receive our own Palm branches, let us take them to our homes and place them somewhere where we can always see them. Let the Palms remind us that Christ is the king of our families, that Christ is the king of our hearts, that Christ is the only true answer to happiness and meaning in our lives. And if we do proclaim Christ as our king, let us try and make time for Him in our daily life, let us be reminded that He is the one with whom we will be spending eternity. Let us be reminded that our careers, our education, our finances, our homes, all of the basic material needs in our lives are only temporary. Let us prioritize and place Christ the king as the primary concern in our lives. It is only when we have done this that we will find true peace and happiness in such a confused and complex world.

Amen.

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